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1 message

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Coyote protocol pondered by Wheaton

[PHOTO] Wheaton might adopt a policy that focuses on educating residents about coyotes in an effort to prevent the animals from becoming a threat.

DAILY HERALD FILE PHOTO

By Robert Sanchez

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With suburban coyotes here to stay, Wheaton officials are looking to promote coexistence.

They have developed a proposed policy on dealing with the wild animals that includes launching a public awareness campaign, enforcing a feeding ban and removing aggressive coyotes. City council members are expected to review the 17-page draft during a Monday night planning session.

The proposal comes months after Wheaton earlier this year hired a professional trapper in response to reports of aggressive coyote behavior and fears some of the animals were sick.

Five coyotes were captured and killed during the week of March 8 in an area near the south-side neighborhood where a small dog was attacked Jan. 27 in its owner's backyard.

When the trapping program ended March 30, officials said all the captured animals had various stages of mange, ranging from slight to severe.

It also was revealed that three of the captured coyotes had "cooked vegetables, dog food, cat food or bread in their digestive systems." Officials said they don't believe the coyotes got that food by rummaging through trash.

So council members in May extended a ban on feeding feral cats and dogs to include raccoons, skunks, opossums and coyotes.

Assistant City Manager Mike Dzugan said the goal of the new policy is to stop coyotes from becoming too comfortable in Wheaton neighborhoods. That includes educating residents that they shouldn't feed coyotes or other wild animals.

"One of the causes of habituation is feeding," Dzugan said. "Whether you're feeding directly to coyotes or feeding feral cats, all of that

is a food source for the coyotes."

The education campaign would include brochures, cable television programs, postcards and signs near parks.

Residents also would be taught to use "hazing" techniques when encountering coyotes. That includes shouting, chasing and throwing objects to drive the animals away.

"Either consciously or unconsciously, the coyotes are much more comfortable with us," Mayor Michael Gresk said. "Every study you read says you have to make them uncomfortable."

If a coyote becomes aggressive and starts taking pets from yards, the city could remove the animal.

The proposed policy also recommends hiring a trapper to track coyotes to find anyone who might be feeding the animals. Any Wheaton residents convicted of violating the town's feeding law could be fined \$100 to \$950 per occurrence.

Another suggestion is for the city to develop a detailed system to track complaints about coyotes and create a sightings database.

Wheaton police say there's an average of 65 to 70 coyote sightings a month. There haven't been any reports of aggressive coyotes since the trapping was halted, officials said.

Initially, it would cost \$10,000 to \$15,000 for Wheaton to implement the recommendations listed in the proposed policy. There also would be an annual cost of \$5,000 to \$10,000. None of the estimates include the cost of staff time.

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